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ABSTRACT

The paper cites changes in demography which make critical the need for improved policy and practice in serving bilingual exceptional students. A 1984 study of identification and placement of 111 Hispanic and non-Hispanic students in learning disability programs in an urban school disrict in Texas compared student characteristics, membership of students' referral and placement committees, assesssment practices, and the nature of services recommended. Further analysis included comparisons of special education policy and practice (including findings of a standard approach to assessment for all students), program availability, and personnel (sample was predominantly non-Hispanic). The paper presents recommendations for identification and placement (such as developing explicit policy in "child find," and classifying special education referral as a last resort), for programs (including clear policy describing the primacy of language), and for professional development (such as specific training for bilingual and limited English proficient students). (CL)

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Policy Issues Associated With Serving Bilingual Exceptional Children

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Running head: POLICY ISSUES IN BILINGUAL SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Policy Issues Associated with Serving Bilingual Exceptional Children

Rather dramatic changes are occurring in the demography of this country. An examination of the changes in the U.S. resident population by race between the 1970 and 1980 U.S. census years reflects that the White or Anglo population has declined from 83% to 76.8%, while the Hispanic population has increased from 4.5% to 6.4%, with the Black population remaining relatively stable at 11.1% to 11.7 percent. Of greater importance to educators is the fact that public school enrollment reflects parallel changes relative to its ethnic composition; i.e., between 1972 and 1983, White student enrollment declined by 4.6%, while enrollments rose by 42.9% for Hispanics and 38.7% for Blacks (Feistritzer, 1985).

For educators the significance of this changing demography in the public school population becomes even more obvious when an examination is made of the median age of White, Black, and Hispanic populations. The median age represents a measure of the child bearing potential and, in turn, of projected enrollments of school age children of each ethnic group. Specifically, the median age of White citizens of this country is over 31 years, the median age of Black citizens is almost 24 years, and for Hispanics, just over 21 years of age. The implication is obvious: in the future, public school populations will continue to reflect greater numbers of minority students.

Some may hold the perception that this increased minority school population is an isolated or geographically centered phenomenon, such as in the Southwest or the Southeast. However, it should be pointed out that in 1982, 49.2% of public school students in New Jersey, 56.3% of students in California, 32% in

New York, 33% in Maryland, 49% in New Mexico, and 58.5% of the public school students in Illinois were of minority background. In fact, in all but two of the 25 largest public school systems in this country, more than half of the students are minority.

One of the great concerns in recent years, as reflected in the literature and in public policy statements, is the decline in SAT scores for students in this country. While there has been some encouragement about small increases in average SAT scores, it is interesting to note that most of this increase can be related to increases in the scores of minorities, not of Whites. However, as reflected in Figure 1, there is a direct relationship between SAT achievement and median family income, particularly for the largest ethnic minority groups in this country - Black, Mexican American and Puerto Rican (Feistritzer, 1985).

Insert Figure 1 about here

These educational effects by ethnicity become explicit when examining the percentage of students graduating. For example, in the state of Texas, 78% of the White population graduates from high school. However, while Texas has had the fastest growing Hispanic population (33.5% increase) within public schools in the past ten years, the number of Hispanic high school graduates is slightly more than one-half, with only 56.7% of Hispanic students completing high school. The conclusion appears clear: the fastest growing population group is also the group with which the schools of Texas are having the least success in educating. Success in educational institutions for minorities in this country steadfastly diminishes in dramatic fashion as one progresses to higher levels of the educational enterprise (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

There is a clear relationship between education and earning power in this country. As has been seen, the educational attainment of the different ethnic groups is dramatically lower compared to Whites, as is the median income by ethnic group. In 1982, the median income of the White population of this country was $21,117. The median income was $15,178 for Hispanics, and $11,968 for Blacks. These data become even more critical when related to the trend associated with high school graduation. For example, in 1975, Hispanics reflected 57.5% graduating from high school. By 1980, that percentage had declined to 53.7 percent. In 1975, the percentage of Hispanics enrolling in college was 35.4%; by 1980, it had declined to 29.9% (McNett, 1983).

One of the adaptations made by the educational enterprise to serve students who do not make ordinary progress in the educational system is the special education system. Special education represents a unique component of the educational system as it is driven by federal and state legal mandates, and explicit policies and procedures associated with steps for entry to and exit from, special education programs. It reflects a history of concern, including litigation, associated with the service delivery of special education to minority students. A study by Ortiz and Yates (1983) has pointed out the discrepant representation of minorities within special education programs from the expected nation-wide norm. Specifically, there is dramatic over-representation of Hispanics in programs for learning disabled and the communication disordered in Texas. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to investigate

and closely review the operating practices associated with serving minorities within special education.

Historically, large numbers of minority students have been placed in special education (Mercer, 1973; Tucker, 1980). Federal data indicate that 44% of all Hispanics in special education are in programs for the learning disabled (LD), followed by 30.2% in speech. In their study of incidence for Hispanics in special education in Texas, Ortiz & Yates, (1983) showed that, with the exception of LD programs, Hispanics are under-served in special education. Eighty percent of Hispanic handicapped students are in LD and speech programs, with three times as many students in LD as might be expected from their representation in the school enrollment.

The research literature on placement of students in special education identifies several factors which influence decision-makers as well as the decision-making process (Blaschke, 1979; Ortiz & Yates, 1983; Stearns, Green, & David, 1980). In brief, these may include some or all of the following: policy and law; variability in state and local definitions of the handicap; litigation; availability of human, material, and financial resources in the district; shortage of assessment personnel; and inadequate procedures--including bias in the referral and assessment process. Special education services to language minority students may additionally be affected by a lack of bilingual programs and personnel, availability of bilingual education as an option to special education, and increased awareness and understanding of issues and research related to bilingualism and other unique student attributes.

A Documented Need for Improved Policy and Practice

Studies of Hispanic learning disabled and speech impaired students in Texas (Garcia, 1984; Maldonado-Colon, 1984) and perceptual-communicative disordered students in Colorado (Shepard & Smith, 1981) have revealed that the reasons for referral to, and placement in, these programs are often related to the acquisition of English as a second language, and/or that referring teachers may be unable to distinguish a true language disorder from the developmental process of acquiring a second language.

In her research, discussed in detail below, Garcia (1984) focused specifically on district policies and practices related to the identification and placement of 111 Hispanic and non-Hispanic students in LD programs in an urban school district in Texas. Student characteristics were compared by ethnicity, as were variables such as membership of students' referral and placement committees, assessment practices, and the nature of services recommended. Information was also sought related to the educational background, training and experience of 131 school district personnel involved in the referral, assessment and placement process for the students in the sample.

Characteristics of Hispanic LD Students

For all students in the sample (Hispanic and non-Hispanic), the most frequent reasons for referral were problems in reading and language. Referring teachers did not appear to make decisions based on the Hispanic student's primary language and/or history of bilingual education, if any. This distinction may be an important one since 39% of all placements in compensatory education were in bilingual and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for Hispanics in the sample, in addition to an equal number in Title I/Chapter 1

reading and math.

While behavior problems were not a frequent reason for the referral of Hispanic students, an interesting difference was noted in the nature of problems reported for these children. Hispanic students were more likely to experience problems in the areas of attention and order, or relations with adults and authority. More detailed analyses are needed to investigate this difference and to identify the specific behaviors under these general categories. Future research should consider the possibility that certain culturally determined behaviors manifested by Hispanic students may be interpreted as inappropriate within the school environment. Additionally, certain behavior "problems," such as inattention and inability to follow directions, may well be the result of the limited English proficient student's failure to understand the instructions or activities in the classroom.

Linguistic data were available for approximately half the Hispanic sample, and usually consisted of the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) (Duncan & DeAvila, 1981). Since this information was inconsistent, outdated or incomplete, comparisons of referral and assessment data by language proficiency or dominance were limited or not possible. Where this information was available, Hispanics appeared to demonstrate low levels of English proficiency (see Table 2).

Low English proficiency appeared to influence the test performance of Hispanic students who consistently scored lower than non-Hispanics on all subtests of the Verbal Scale of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised (WISC-R) (Wechsler, 1974), except the arithmetic subtest, and who were thus more likely to have Full Scale IQ scores below 80. In contrast, they performed as well as non-Hispanic students on the Performance Scale and also had

similar achievement test profiles. Finally, because of the depressed scores on the Verbal Scale, Hispanic students frequently showed discrepancies of 15 points or more between the Verbal and Performance Scales of the WISC-R (see Table 3).

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

Based on these evaluation results, Hispanic students, like their non-Hispanic peers, were placed in LD resource programs for reading and language instruction. However, an important difference in special education services was found in the provision of related services and the identification of a secondary handicap. Only Hispanics were found to be identified as LD/SH and were receiving speech therapy as a related service. Non-Hispanic students usually received counseling or other related services. Though this study did not investigate the nature of speech problems for Hispanic students, Maldonado-Colon (1984) showed that many problems identified as speech handicaps tend to be related to articulation and second language acquisition.

Comparisons of Special Education Policy and Practice

The district's policy manual for special education reflected an awareness and knowledge of desired professional practices and procedural safeguards related to the identification of handicapping conditions for minority students. However, greater emphasis is needed on procedures affecting limited English proficient(LEP) and/or bilingual students during the process of referral, assessment and placement. Discrepancies between district policy and professional practice were noted in several areas, suggesting that district guidelines may not provide school personnel with adequate direction, especially given

the shortage of professionals with the relevant training and experience to work with language minority, handicapped students. Often, data required to be gathered were missing or reported inadequately. For Hispanic students, these missing data included language proficiency and dominance information.

Assessment practices revealed a standard approach to all students, in terms of the number and types of tests used, the language of administration, as well as interpretation of the results. For the vast majority, the identification of LD as the primary handicap was based on results from three to four tests: the WISC-R, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) (Jastak & Jastak, 1978) and/or the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) (Dunn & Markwardt, 1970), and the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test (Koppitz, 1975). Only 12 out of 74 administrations were reported as bilingual for Hispanic students; however no details were recorded about administration, scoring or interpretation, making this information difficult to interpret.

Finally, the analysis of practices revealed limited or no participation of other special program personnel in the referral, assessment and placement processes. Referral committees were usually composed of the principal, the counselor, and regular and special education teachers. Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committees were similarly composed of administrative, appraisal and instructional representatives from regular and special education, but rarely documented the presence of professional staff from the bilingual education, ESL or Chapter 1 programs.

Program Availability

The availability of other special programs as an option to special education did not appear to be an issue in this district, as Title I/Chapter 1 and bilingual education services were available in all schools included in this study. However, eligibility criteria for such programs were based on achievement tests that were not usually included in the special education review process. In the absence of this test information and the limited participation of personnel from these programs in the decision-making processes of special education, students are less likely to be identified as eligible for such services even when they qualify. Greater collaboration is needed between programs in order to improve service delivery for students who need bilingual special education.

Personnel

Information gathered on a sample of 131 district personnel showed that, in contrast to the high (77%) Hispanic enrollment in the district, the personnel sample was predominantly non-Hispanic. A little over half were assessment or supervisory personnel, including educational diagnosticians, school psychologists, counselors, speech therapists and special education supervisors. The rest were special program instructional staff. Although the data revealed a relatively high number of dual endorsements in LD and bilingual education, the proportion of Spanish-speaking individuals was low, with no information about their level of Spanish proficiency. It should be noted that Spanish-speaking skills alone cannot improve assessment or instructional quality unless accompanied by training in issues related to bilingualism and language.

Implications for Policy and Administrative Practice

Results of the Garcia (1984) study indicate that there is a general need to re-examine and revise current special education policies and guidelines to improve the processes of identification and decision-making related to limited English proficient handicapped students. The following recommendations are made to assist school districts in developing policies and guidelines to improve services for language minority handicapped students.

Identification and Placement

1. Districts need explicit policy in the arena of "child find" as the possibility exists for handicapped Hispanic students to remain unidentified based upon the culturally-based reluctance of the family to allow someone other than the family to assume responsibility and/or the obligation for the care of a handicapped child. Even the concept of placing that child within the responsibility of the school could be a problem which would necessitate policy that would assure the participation of appropriate school personnel with cultural understanding and language proficiency in the community to help identify handicapped students who might not otherwise come to the attention of the school.

2. Based upon the evidence and data of current practice, it seems particularly important for school districts to develop policy which makes it clear that referral to special education is the "last step" and is utilized only after all other interventions have been attempted. These might include assessment of language proficiency and the identification of the effects of language procficiency and dominance, utilization of bilingual and/or ESL instruction, and re-teaching of the basic concepts. Conceptually, the special education model is the "continuum of services" model, which indicates that spe-

cial education is, in fact, more restrictive in terms of the concept of normalization, than other interventions.

3. As referral to special education occurs, districts must have policies which assure that assessment is accomplished by trained qualified assessors utilizing assessment materials and procedures which match the child's current language dominance. The comprehensive assessment should not be initiated or accomplished prior to an effective language assessment, and the assessment process must match the language dominance determined through that assessment.

4. School districts need to have policy in place and procedures implemented to assure that the various placement or decision-making committees have the skill to interpret assessment data in light of the language and culture of the child when dealing with LEP or bilingual children. Specifically, this implies the presence and participation of an individual on the placement committee who is more than a mere interpreter to the parent, who knows the various options within the educational system, and who understands the orientation of bilingual education, ESL, regular education and special education. For most districts, it may be more efficacious to develop the knowledge and understanding of special education programs among bilingual education personnel, than to have special educators attempt to learn and understand the implications of a second language and culture.

Programs

There are specific program implications for school districts:

1. District policy needs to be quite explicit that it is the right of the bilingual or limited English proficient handicapped student to have the same access to the range of special education services as any other handicapped

student. For example, a student in bilingual education who is ascertained to be handicapped should have access to special education services.

2. Districts need to have policies which indicate that it is not only appropriate but essential to provide special education instructional methodologies to the limited English proficient bilingual student who is handicapped. If special education has special procedures that are efficacious for improving the learning of handicapped students, there is clear logic and obligation to provide such special methodologies of instruction and materials to the handicapped youngster who is also of limited English proficiency or bilingual.

3. There should be clear district policy that there can and should be linkages and interface between regular education, (including various compensatory education programs, such as Chapter 1), bilingual education and special education. These programs should not be seen as isolated or free standing programs when it comes to serving the limited English proficient or bilingual handicapped student.

4. There is a need for clear district policy describing the primacy of language, i.e., the initial and continuing major instructional task is the development of language proficiency. The literature now supports quite strongly the concept that the critical variable related to achievement is proficiency of language, regardless of the particular language. Therefore, handicapped limited English proficient or bilingual students may very often have greater need for bilingual education services than the "normal" limited English proficient student. Since instruction and learning are dependent in our educational systems upon the development of language proficiency, attention must be devoted to the process of developing proficiency in the first language, and this proficiency

should be demonstrated at a level appropriate for movement into academic learning in the second language.

5. School districts need explicit policies which require the monitoring of the language development process for the handicapped limited English proficient child. The information presented at the time of the original placement decision, Individual Educational Plan (IEP) development, and IEP revisions should include recent information relative to the language development progress of the child. Recognizing the primacy of language development to the educational processes, placement committees and those revising IEP's cannot make referral decisions without information on current language development status.

6. Districts should have explicit policies regarding the competencies of teachers serving bilingual limited English proficient handicapped students. Such competencies should be equal to those of teachers providing services to other children, i.e., the responsibility for instruction of the limited English proficient or bilingual handicapped student cannot be turned over to a bilingual aide. In fact, the district has an obligation, if the student is in need of ESL instruction or bilingual instruction, to have that instruction provided by teachers who are trained and competent.

7. District policy should explicitly delineate the exit criteria from special education for the limited English proficient or bilingual handicapped student. These criteria should be identical to those for other handicapped students. That is, the student who is bilingual or limited English proficient and also handicapped should have the same criteria applied to exiting from special education as any other handicapped student.

8. Districts need a monitoring system to assure that district policies are

being implemented as delineated and intended. The findings of this study indicated discrepancies in several areas between district special education policy and actual practice, especially in terms of the data to be gathered and the individuals involved in the referral, assessment and placement of bilingual handicapped students.

Professional Development

The implications for policy relative to professional development of staff are extensive when considered within the context of bilingual or limited English proficient handicapped students.

1. Based upon the current and emerging demography it becomes compelling for institutions of higher education providing pre-service training of regular educators, bilingual educators and special educators to have policies which require their training programs and skill development procedures to address the unique assessment, admission and instructional requirements of bilingual and limited English proficient handicapped students. Just as it has become appropriate to include those elements associated with special education programming within the pre-service training of regular education teachers, it should be equally rational for training programs to include information relative to the bilingual or limited English proficient student and the interface between special education and bilingual education. Specialty training areas, such as those for school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, school counselors, etc., should include specific information associated with the unique service delivery needs of the limited English proficient or bilingual handicapped student.

2. There is a clear need for providing information and developing aware-

ness and skills related to bilingual and limited English proficient handicapped students within a continuing education context. It is quite evident that the majority of educational service personnel are in place and will not be replaced by pre-service trained persons. Therefore, there should be policy requiring content related to serving bilingual and limited English proficient students to be included in in-service and continuing education activities for various professionals including administrators, assessment personnel and teachers.

The research literature supports the concept that for change and improvement to occur, there must be knowledge and support of key administrators such as the school principal. Therefore, school districts should have policies which assure that key administrators (in all three complementary disciplines--special, bilingual and regular education) do, in fact, have information and knowledge associated with providing appropriate services to limited English proficient and bilingual handicapped students.

Special education as a unit of the educational system is driven by the process of assessment to enter and exit special education. It behooves school districts to have policies which assure that assessment personnel have information, training and skills associated with the assessment of language, the assessment of handicaps and the assessment of academic learning competencies using appropriate procedures, instrumentation and interpretation for limited English proficient or bilingual handicapped students. Often, training at the continuing education level is not recognized as a need relative to school psychologists, diagnosticians, counselors and others as they represent a relatively small percentage of the educational personnel. However, within the context of special education for this unique handicapped child, they become critical and

must have appropriate information, knowledge and skills.

The need for teachers to have appropriate knowledge and skills relative to the limited English proficient or bilingual handicapped student is, of course, quite compelling. However, it must be made clear that districts should have policy stating that teachers in all three complementary disciplines - regular, special and bilingual education - have appropriate training to bring about the levels of understanding necessary to effectively serve this uniquely handicapped student. The literature from the effective schools research clearly points up the importance associated with teacher expectations. Such expectations for the limited English proficient bilingual student who is also handicapped must be addressed.

Conclusion

Current and emerging demography point to the critical need for education institutions to recognize and address the unique learning needs of bilingual and/or limited English proficient students. To ignore these needs reflects irresponsibility on the part of the educational system and of society, as in the future, society will be dependent upon the educational attainment of this minority population. Minority students, in fact, represent the "work force of this nation" for the next generation. Evidence from current practice within public schools confirms that there are, at this time, problems, difficulties, inefficiencies and inhumanity of service delivery to limited English proficient and bilingual handicapped students. These problems and difficulties must be addressed. There is a range of specific policies and procedures that school districts should feel obligated to implement or create in order to appropriately serve this unique handicapped student. To do less is, at best, poor educational practice, possibly and probably illegal, but most importantly, inhumane.

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Table 1

Persistence in Higher Education by Racial or Ethnic Group

	Percentage Who:				
	Complete High School	Enter College	Complete College	Enter Graduate or Professional School	Complete Graduate or Professional School
Whites	83	38	23	14	8
Blacks	72	29	12	8	4
Chicanos	55	22	7	4	2
Puerto Ricans	55	25	7	4	2
American Indians	55	17	6	4	2

Note. From Minorities in American Higher Education (p. 51) by A. W. Astin, 1982, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc. Copyright 1982 by Jossey-Bass, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Table 2

Performance of Hispanic Learning Disabled Students on the Language Assessment Scales

Scales & Levels	No.(%) of Students	
LAS-English (N=38)		
Level 1 Non-English	17	(44.7)
Level 2 Non-English	4	(10.5)
Level 3 Bilingual	7	(18.4)
Level 4 Near Fluent, English	6	(15.8)
Level 5 Fluent English speaker	4	(10.5)
LAS-Spanish (N=28)		
Level 1 Non-Spanish	13	(46.4)
Level 2 Non-Spanish	8	(28.6)
Level 3 Bilingual	2	(7.1)
Level 4 Near Fluent, Spanish	3	(10.7)
Level 5 Fluent Spanish speaker	2	(7.1)

Table 3

Mean Scaled Scores and IQ on the Verbal and Performance Scales of the WISC-R by Ethnicity

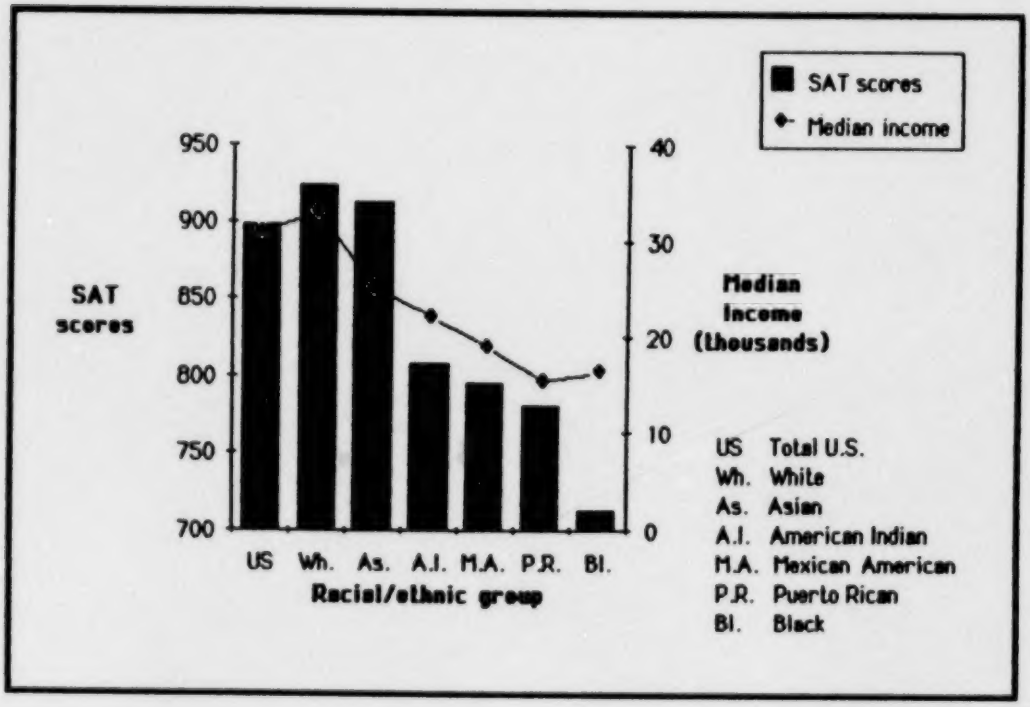
Scale/Subtest	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
Verbal Scale Scores (N=89)		
Information	5.6*	7.0
Similarities	7.0**	9.4
Arithmetic	7.7	8.2
Vocabulary	7.1**	8.9
Comprehension	7.7**	9.9
Digit Span (N=62)	6.1**	7.9
Sum of Scaled Scores	35.3***	43.8
Performance Scale Scores (N=92)		
Picture Completion	9.9	9.8
Picture Arrangement	9.4	10.3
Block Design	9.6	8.8
Object Assembly	10.4	10.2
Coding	9.2	8.4
Mazes (N=13)	11.0	10.2
Sum of Scales Scores	48.4	47.5
Verbal Scale IQ	81.6	92.1
Performance Scale IQ	97.9	96.4
Full Scale IQ		

Note: *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.005

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Relationship between SAT Scores and median family income by racial/ethnic group, 1984.

Note. Adapted from "Cheating our Children: Why we Need School Reform" (p. 10) by C. E. Feistritzer, 1985, Washington, D. C.: National Center for Education Information. Copyright 1985 by the National Center for Education Information. Adapted by permission.


SAT scores
Median income
950
900
850
800
750
700
SAT scores
40
30
20
10
0
Median income (thousands)
US Wh. As. A.I. M.A. P.R. Bl.
Racial/ethnic group
US Total U.S.
Wh. White
As. Asian
A.I. American Indian
M.A. Mexican American
P.R. Puerto Rican
Bl. Black